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## **On the Vagaries of Production Research**

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The editors of this volume have asked me to undertake a brief stocktaking: to reflect on my experience of undertaking production research of various kinds in the media and cultural fields since the early 1970s. I shall begin by discussing my earliest research and then – covering intervening decades – consider examples of other projects pertinent to the concerns of this book, as well as changes in how the role of the researcher has been conceived and enacted. This essay is intended to be exploratory rather than comprehensive – a first pass at an argument. If this text seems to be unduly self-referential, my apologies, but that goes with the territory I have been asked to traverse.

### **A beginning**

My first deep – and enduring – professional formation was in ethnographic sociology, when I undertook a long-term study of journalism – between 1971 and 1976 – at the BBC, initially for my doctorate and then with a follow-up period for my book, *Putting 'Reality' Together* (Schlesinger, 1978). That volume was about the daily round of BBC journalism, the beliefs and practices that sustained it, the ways in which news production was controlled and enabled, and the pressures that its producers faced. I

then regarded that study – and still do – as an exercise in the sociology of knowledge, and that has been a keystone for subsequent work.<sup>1</sup> To judge by continuing citations and occasional correspondence from students, my first work still has some life left in it (if only to be critiqued), despite momentous changes in the media and communications landscape and the refocusing of academic research since the 1970s.

When I began my project, the then tiny cohort of British media sociologists was deeply influenced both by key examples of fieldwork inside US network broadcasting organizations and, at the same time, rapidly developing an indigenous tradition of its own.<sup>2</sup> Not all production studies undertaken at that time focused on journalism. Although the news was undoubtedly the central object of study, there was also novel observational work on current affairs, documentary, and film production.<sup>3</sup>

What began originally as a markedly Anglo-American venture, driven by a desire to demystify the socially central definitional powers of network news and to unpick its legitimations – notably occupational claims to objectivity and impartiality – has subsequently multiplied adherents, significantly shifted its objects of study, and greatly widened its geographical reach, as this volume amply testifies.

I am intrigued by the curious view that the so-called ‘first wave’ of media ethnographies eventually became an orthodox trammel on research, requiring a ‘second wave’ in order to think matters through afresh. It is self-evident that news production has greatly changed in the digital age, when the boundaries of journalism have become increasingly unsettled and contested, as has the institutional form of newspapers and broadcasting. There is now more complexity due to innovations resulting from the introduction of digital technologies, and obvious disruption of established patterns of temporality and the production cycles that went with these. So

it goes without saying that a new approach is required to analyse the world as we now find it.

The work that I undertook, along with others at the time, was certainly conducted under more stable conditions in a more easily decipherable media environment than today's. Once its particularity is recognized, and the prevailing conditions that gave it anchorage identified, it is hard to see why these should be regarded as imposing an obstacle to successor work, or why the insights garnered should be discarded, rather than providing a basis for a critical reworking and, where there is still analytical purchase, adaptation to present circumstance. Indeed, making a broader case for a revival of media sociology in general, Howard Tumber (2014: 75) has recently argued that any contemporary

'revision of sociological definitions and frameworks for media analysis should also consider existing continuities in the way that news organizations operate and interact with other institutions such as private companies, governments and lobbies. In the requirement to include the use of new technologies, actors, and the configuration of roles, media researchers should not forget that there are several continuities in the way that news production is funded, influenced and validated.'

For sure, the conditions of media production, distribution and consumption have changed radically as we live in the moment of mobile connectivity, user-generated content and social media. Such transformations do pose new challenges for research, not least in terms of how to address technological developments, changed political and economic contexts, and new organizational and occupational forms (Waisbord, 2014). That said, in the field of journalism, for instance, carefully weighed continuities with previous research are evident in some current studies, with suitable adjustments made to scope and method without therefore needing to argue for a

radical break (Puijk, 2008; Willig, 2013). In this vein, for instance, I would argue that a focus on contemporary management strategies devised to address the impact of digitization on the newspaper is perfectly complementary to the continuing need to understand present-day processes of news production (Schlesinger and Doyle, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

But the issue is more fundamental than a matter of adapting research methods to new conditions or the complexity that results from the transformative effects of technological change. The acid test concerns the questions that we think are worth posing. Media production research is but one quite specialized line of inquiry in media research in general. Then, as now, ‘first wave’ concerns were of a piece with those of others working in the field. Researchers wanted to examine the nature of media power – how decision-making was mediated through organizations – to demystify claims to professionalism and objectivity made by journalists, to show how the market for news was structured and what its outcomes were. While some of the best-known work was conducted in public service or regulated organizations, questions concerning ownership and control, political and other influence, social conflicts and the reproduction of consensual ideologies were all part of the wider agenda in which production studies were conducted. The list is far from exhaustive. Have these kinds of issue suddenly become irrelevant? If we take just one key issue – the exercise of power and its control – the answer is a resounding no. Plainly, this is a continuing concern from a range of perspectives, and still at the heart of much contemporary media research (Castells, 2009; Davis, 2007; Freedman, 2014).

Beyond how research is framed, a different question that we need to address anew concerns the role of the academic researcher. In the UK, at least, the conditions under which we undertake research have begun to change quite radically. Writing this essay in 2015, it is striking how expectations about the public role played by

academic researchers are being profoundly redefined. In Britain, often the precursor in these matters, the present sea change has been driven by systems of official accountability that are reshaping academic norms. The Research Excellence Framework (REF), installed at the UK government's behest by the various higher education Funding Councils, the results of which were reported at the end of 2014, has begun to implant a culture in which thinking of the 'impact' of research 'beyond academia' is now part and parcel of our working practices and career structures. This focus is not by any means totally new. But what is different is that it is becoming a general condition, beyond being a requirement restricted to those who have had to design their 'pathways to impact' when applying for a Research Council grant.

In the UK certainly, but also elsewhere, the present imperatives have propelled us into demonstrating publicly that we undertake 'knowledge exchange' with those that we research, and to show that we can exact some extra-academic impact by accounting for the value of our research. Taken together, such approaches are transforming the normative foundations of academic work. And they make considerable demands on our reflexivity as we negotiate funding and, if successful, how we seek to pursue the work that we really wish to undertake.

At one level, imparting what we have discovered to wider publics is quite unexceptionable and indeed desirable. And trying to influence or transform a debate or a condition is a laudable aspiration. It is what you would expect of any intellectual or scientific endeavour. However, I am opposed to the coercive aspects of this new regime and think we need to defend the maximum autonomy feasible. There is a moral and political difference between opting to be a citizen-academic and being compelled to be one. In short, it is important to be alert to the undoubtedly perverse effects of the present commanding heights approach to managing the norms and

values of academic research. The logic is that of accounting; the cover story is that we are all to become public intellectuals.

Those who can readily recall how expectations have shifted within the lifespan of a career, or just part of one, even when working in institutions that have been far from privileged, do have a role to play. One easy response, of course, is to quit the scene in disgust amidst well-publicized recriminations. Another is to try to develop resilient cultures, which sustain the continuing value and importance of the academic freedom to think, to produce, and to pursue a project that matters. These ideals have always been qualified in practice, and much depends on where you work, the resources available, and the openness of the local regime. But even if more honoured in the breach than the observance, the value of academic freedom and its supporting norms have a crucial constitutive role in imagining what it is to be an academic, providing both ideological armour and a point of contrast with the imperatives of the system as presently constituted. Increasingly, therefore, the challenge is to identify what is positive in the new research order and to make it our own in ways of our own devising, as it cannot be avoided.<sup>5</sup>

While the idea of some engagement in the wider policy process was hardly alien when I undertook my first research, I cannot but be struck by the distance travelled as we have finally entered REF-land to receive the new tablets of stone. My study of the BBC was in many respects typical of a truly different moment, as I consciously eschewed the discourse of improvement for that of critique, in ways that I now consider rather naïve, as I quickly discovered that critique has its own force and may propel you to where you do not expect to be. In an article written at that time reflecting on my fieldwork, I underlined the difference between my approach and that of Elihu Katz who, along with others at that moment, was working in the

Lazarsfeldian tradition of contributing to policy formation at the BBC (Schlesinger, 1980).

In retrospect, it is clear that I did not anticipate some consequences of my research. They were not great, but they were certainly professionally significant for me. First, my analysis of the BBC's coverage of the violent conflict in Northern Ireland – then a highly contentious topic – was taken up by the campaign against censorship in broadcasting. Second, after an initially cool reception, my book became part of the common sense of a new generation of journalists at the BBC. Following a decent interval, for instance, I was invited to contribute to an internal review of industrial news and current affairs reporting. Third, I found that I had acquired the aura of expertise, which led to some broadcast interviews and appearances and occasional journalism. None of this – as it would be now – was part of a calculus about the impact of research; it just happened.

The distinction between 'critical' and 'administrative' approaches outlined by Lazarsfeld (1941), still a live reference point at the time, was certainly not absolute among media researchers in the 1970s and early 1980s – and remains pertinent today. For instance, academics in the field (myself included) did engage in debate with broadcasters, regulators, and politicians about matters of public policy when the first such encounters began to be increasingly common.<sup>6</sup> Some contributed research to parliamentary enquiries into the ownership and regulation of the press. By the early 1980s, left-orientated cultural policy advice and cultural industries consultancy had become fashionable and quite established. So, too, had conducting broadcasting research intended to be credible to the industry from outside the academy as well as at arm's length from the broadcasters' own research departments.<sup>7</sup> By then, however, the 'first wave' of production studies had largely passed into history.



Some later work

In retrospect, I am struck by the extraordinary privilege of being able to conduct a solo ethnography. In what has been a busy career, the opportunity to do so again has so far not arisen. One – very recent – attempt to gain access for an ethnography of a performing arts institution of world class met with an eventual no, as, after a lengthy interrogation by a fist of executives and then a request to read my work, they finally took fright at the risk of letting me in. There's one for the chapbook of refusals.

There is doubtless a broader lesson here and an imperfect generalization. As your career progresses, if it does, and life makes ever more complex demands on your time, pursuing a long-form solo ethnography becomes ever more difficult, unless you manage to secure a fellowship to finance time out, or take leave. My most common practice – paralleled by that of colleagues and contemporaries – has long involved a well-defined division of labour in research teams in line with the funding economy's rules of the game. A principal investigator (PI), co-investigator(s) (CI), and postdoctoral research associate(s) (PDRA) are the personnel that now make up most British teams. Seniority, as I know too well, takes one increasingly towards project management and often blocks your working on the most interesting aspects of front-line research. In countervailing mode, whatever the difficulty, I have made it a rule to undertake interviews and, where possible, to pursue some distinctive line of observation in any major fieldwork project that I have led.

Production research on culture and media commonly involves several methods. The most privileged, of course, is observation – the researcher being present in the settings to be investigated. Where feasible, this is generally coupled with interviewing and also the gathering of documentation and other artifacts that conduce to the further understanding of the production process and the constitutive social

relations in play. Since my first work on the BBC, funded by the Social Science Research Council, all the research discussed here has been funded by either the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) or the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and has been collaborative in the ways outlined. Sometimes, happily, it has involved a genuinely ethnographic dimension – access to a setting and repeated exposure to internal discourse and action.

We do need to be cautious what we claim here. Sociologist Paul Atkinson, in a recent distillation of his decades of practice and reflection, proposed that ethnography ‘involves some degree of direct participation and observation [that] constitutes a radically distinctive way of understanding social activity in situ’ (Atkinson, 2015: 3–4). That presupposes some significant exposure to a given setting or settings. In part, this is about time spent in a particular way; but it is also signally about what insights such access may afford that are simply unavailable in any other way.

To indicate both continuity and change in the trajectory of my work, I shall next briefly discuss two studies involving teamwork. These contrast greatly with my work on the BBC, which focused principally on the internal workings of the news operation of a single organization, then as now, enormously central to British life. Of course, although the wider political and economic contexts were crucial to making that account comprehensible, most analysis was of what Tom Burns (1977), in his penetrating work, aptly called the private world of a public institution.

The two cases in question were conducted in well-defined milieux. They also investigated the relations between specific institutions and organizations and various networks of actors in full pursuit of their diverse interests. In this, they reflect a given stage in the further development of production studies whose particularity has perhaps not been fully recognized and discussed. Much ‘second wave’ analysis has been a

response to technology-generated complexity in the media field. Well before this, however, immanent developments were occurring in the field, reflected in the projects next discussed. Each involved a division of labour, along the lines indicated, that combined observation, interviewing, the collection of documentation, and analyses of media output.

*Reporting Crime* (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994) was a study of the media politics of crime journalism.<sup>8</sup> With most research undertaken in London, it analysed diverse interactions between policy-makers, pressure groups, criminal justice professionals, and specialist reporters in shaping crime news; fieldwork was mainly conducted between 1986 and 1988, with some later follow-ups. The players were the police in several major cities, the Home Office (then the sole UK government department dealing with criminal justice), legal and civil liberty bodies, media organizations, and numerous others, all integral to the process of shaping the production of news because of how their fields of activity intersected.

By stepping out of the workings of any particular organization and its production of news, this work deliberately eschewed media-centrism: it insisted on the importance of sources' relations to journalists and focused on how they used the various resources at their disposal in pursuit of their media strategies.<sup>9</sup> The resulting relational perspective on transactions between media and sources, for some time at least, proved to be quite influential in informing subsequent research. Without our then knowing it, this approach to 'promotional culture' (Wernick, 1991) in some respects anticipated the more complex world of content production beyond institutional journalism that now characterizes the Internet age, in which the role of sources continues to be a matter of debate (Franklin and Carlson, 2011). Some of this research was disseminated by way of presentations and accessible articles to non-

academic audiences, and evidence was also given to the Home Office's Working Group on the Fear of Crime, which reported in 1989.

*Open Scotland?* (Schlesinger, Miller and Dinan, 2001) had a more expressly interventionist aim. It investigated the initial post-devolution moment, when a new political communication system was being set up in Edinburgh. It drew substantially on theories of nationalism and also built on the rethinking of media-centrism already alluded to.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, the study depicted the interaction between journalists, spin doctors and lobbyists whose communication strategies were addressed to the new parliament; fieldwork was conducted between 1999 and 2000.<sup>11</sup> This was a formative moment in Scotland, and the new parliament and government and the political space afforded have been a precondition for the still unresolved debate over independence v. devolution that has followed and has impacted hugely on British politics.

We undertook some observational research, in my own case inside the expert panel that was drafting the rules for media coverage of the new body, including parliamentary TV, which was a meeting point and locus for negotiation for officials and competing media interests. It was a ringside seat at the writing of one part of the material constitution. As much as showing how different actors were readying either to cover politics, manage government communications, or lobby for specific interests, this was also a study of the collective production of a new space.

*Open Scotland?* investigated the construction of the new political communication system in its initial phase and provided a critique of some early failures to live up to new ideals. It achieved some thoughtful coverage in both the UK and Scottish press. The study was a platform for the research team's evidence to the Scottish Parliament, notably about how lobbying might be regulated and conducted in a more transparent fashion. One unexpected consequence was an invitation by the

Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament for me to lead a confidential audit of the new legislature's communication strategies. Advice was being sought on how best to proceed at a time when, after various early scandals, the Scottish Parliament's reputation was faring particularly badly. *Open Scotland?*, then, analysed a foundational moment and made a contribution to debate in the public domain, as well as leading to some private influence. At a personal level, this work reflected my own civic engagement in, and commitment to Scotland, which continues.<sup>12</sup>

### Some current work

The third project that I wish to discuss has involved a sequence of studies of diverse but interconnected aspects of the so-called creative economy, which is still a work in progress. With fieldwork located both in London and Scotland, in some respects this research has been framed by post-devolution changes in the UK's political geography since 1999 and the strains imposed on the British state by an increasingly outmoded constitution.

Should this work classify as a production study? It should, if we shift attention from media and cultural production proper to some of its preconditions. The focus in this work has been the production of the know-how embodied in organizations set up to intervene in the creative economy. Such investigations, once again, fall under the sociology of knowledge.

Rather than being a single piece of work on the model of the three projects already discussed, however, this line of inquiry has taken the serial form of distinct studies that have involved different collaborations and kinds of fieldwork. Nonetheless, these have built on a longer-term guiding interest, shaped by shifting opportunities both in funding and in the access afforded by various bodies and actors.

Once again, at times, this work has involved me – and my collaborators – in engagement beyond the academy, as the opportunity to influence policy debate or industry thinking has arisen.

In retrospect, I now see that what has become a personal programme of work began quite routinely in 2003 with an invitation to run a specialist seminar on the creative industries for the ESRC and the Office of Science and Technology, a government body; a further such meeting was requested in 2005.<sup>13</sup> These events involved bringing together policy-makers, industry figures, and academics with an interest, on the first occasion, in the disruptive role of digital technologies and, on the second, in the exploitation of intellectual property – issues that are both staple policy concerns. The role in which I was cast (already extremely familiar) was that of brokerage and reportage.

The official interest piqued my own and led in the first instance to asking why the creative industries had become such a focus of policy. That led, by degrees, to a study of creative industries policy-making, with a focus on the BBC as well as the leading film agency at that time, the UK Film Council (UKFC).<sup>14</sup> The idea was to see whether top-down policy-making in the UK government, and the then frenetic production of creativity discourse, had worked its way through two quite different bodies seen as linchpins of the creative economy: the BBC, both a major media production house and central cultural institution, and the UKFC, a key new intermediary for film policy (Magor and Schlesinger, 2009; Schlesinger, 2007; Schlesinger, 2010). This work re-ignited my earlier interest in the role of policy intellectuals, resulting in a study of creative economy ideas brokers, underpinned by a series of interviews (Schlesinger, 2009).<sup>15</sup>

Over more than a decade, this run of research has been interspersed with regular policy-orientated interventions. One of these involved devising a series of seminars at the behest of the Scottish Arts Council and the Scottish Executive (later, the Scottish Government) in 2007. These events were intended to offer a systematic take on the state of Scotland's creative industries in order to inform the process of setting up Creative Scotland, the new lead national agency for the arts and creative industries ultimately established in 2010. The project concluded with a paper for, and briefing of, the pro tem board of the new body.<sup>16</sup>

Since then, much of my empirical research has focused one way or another on related themes, including fieldwork on creative work and copyright (Schlesinger and Waelde, 2010; Waelde and Schlesinger, 2009). Most recently, it has involved two further organizational studies. Each of these projects addressed the question of how cultural intermediaries operate within the framework of creative industries policies. The studies also considered the distinct institutional landscapes within which creative economy support bodies operate in the UK and Scotland. These projects have been conceived relationally. This has involved considering how each agency has been connected with its clientele, its political masters and funders, and a range of enterprises of diverse scales, as well as the broader currents of fashionable thought about what constitutes relevant know-how for intervening in, and building, a competitive creative economy.

The first, *The Rise and Fall of the UK Film Council* (Doyle, Schlesinger, Boyle and Kelly, 2015), investigated the decade-long life of Britain's lead film agency, which was set up to ensure the 'sustainability' of Britain's film industry.<sup>17</sup> Both the creation and destruction of the UKFC raised far-reaching questions about the rationality of film policy, which has been passed like a parcel between the political

parties. It also queried the realism of official aspirations for the UK film industry on the global stage. In many ways, film policy, with its constant oscillation between cultural and economic goals, has been the model for the wider cross-party creative industries policies now in place. As an institutional invention – dismantled in a mere decade – the UKFC belongs in a near century-long history of intervention in the film sector by all governments. It is clear that the longevity of any agency is quite an achievement. Inevitably, there was a political dimension: created by a British Labour government in 2000, the decision to close the UKFC in 2010 was taken by Conservative ministers (in a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats).

This work was based on interviews with most key dramatis personae, supported by such internal documentation as could be unearthed. My prior research on the UKFC, undertaken when it was still a going concern, helped frame a new agenda after its demise, also providing a baseline for comparison with interviews conducted previously. Thus far, the research has been relayed to key industry figures; while arguing with some interpretations, they have not doubted the credibility of the findings. Whether the lessons for taking a longer-term view of film support will be taken up in policy-making circles (a faint hope) remains to be seen.

The second study of this pair, *Curators of Cultural Enterprise*, which exceptionally afforded almost unqualified access for research, was based on ethnographic teamwork in 2013–2014 (Schlesinger, Selfe and Munro, 2015a, b). It focused on a small Scottish agency called Cultural Enterprise Office (CEO), a provider of business support to cultural microbusinesses, which are mostly precarious enterprises. The research team was able to observe routine office activity, attend meetings between creative clients and CEO advisers, discuss strategy with the board and executives, and have access to the organization's database. But, rather like the



UKFC, although much smaller, CEO also proved to be vulnerable to the capricious winds of change. The departure, while we were writing up our analysis, of CEO's chair of the board, and then its director, meant that this research occurred under sometimes quite volatile conditions, requiring considerable delicacy and finely honed ethical judgements about confidentiality. These two leading figures left for reasons to do with overall creative economy policy in Scotland and the organization's adverse funding settlement.

Of all the research discussed so far, *Curators of Cultural Enterprise* was unquestionably a product of the new research order, being designated a 'creative economy knowledge exchange' project in an AHRC programme. This did not affect the principal aim, which was to undertake in-depth research into the work of a cultural intermediary.<sup>18</sup> But it did create at least two major complications.

First, we had to learn how to manage the regular presentation of work in progress to the staff of CEO, as sometimes this held up a challenging mirror to their practices and beliefs; the reactions, positive and negative, shaped the next phase of fieldwork. In this connection, and in keeping with the usual need to seek legitimacy during fieldwork, the role of academic analyst as opposed to the more usual one of consultant needed to be explained, as did the time cycle of even a relatively quick-fire project (funded for one year) such as this. Consultants are paid to work for the client, which limits the extent to which they can detach themselves from their brief. Academics, with a source of funding independent of the body being studied – even where knowledge exchange is central to the remit – have scope to raise fundamental questions about their objects of study. Crucially, then, there is a structural difference in how the roles may be conceived and performed.

Secondly, another key practical issue is how to manage the considerable effort involved in effective knowledge exchange, given its impact on the time budget of empirical research. Preparation for meetings, the running of formally structured feedback sessions, and the incorporation of what is freshly discovered through discussion into the main research process, all take time and demand attention. Our project was not adequately funded to take account of this extra commitment, and we had to seek other resources to extend it. As this kind of approach to research grows in importance, funders will need to recognize that they are asking for more, and pay for it.

#### Concluding thoughts

Writing this essay in the UK at the start of a new phase of the REF, it is hard to ignore the fact that achieving ‘impact’ for one’s research beyond academia will be the order of the day. Fortune may smile on those few British academics undertaking production studies under the new dispensation. Characteristically, such work involves interaction with cultural and media organizations, policy communities, and those engaged in creative labour. Production researchers selected by their institutions to write ‘impact case studies’ might well have a story to tell about how their research has affected the extra-academic world. The empirical warp and weft of such studies puts them in the right place for that kind of treatment.

The cultural change faced by all researchers – desired by the creators of the new system – is the requirement to design ‘impact’ into the research process from the very start. As it happens, we really cannot know, in advance, how such an approach will work out. There is certainly no interest in our recounting negative impacts, such as a rejection of advice, or the collapse of a body that you are researching, or failing

to have any discernible effect on practices because that wasn't the name of the game. In short, telling a good story is not guaranteed, but those undertaking production studies are at least better placed to do so than many others.

As the wider cultural economy has undergone profound transformations in respect of production, distribution, and consumption, the once singular tradition of media production research – now dignified, or discarded, as the 'first wave' – has rightly needed to be rethought. So, for instance, diverse forms of media work that might earlier have been compartmentalized have become an integral part of wider analyses of cultural labour (Deuze, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). In arriving at this point, however, much academic research now has to negotiate with a creative economy discourse that has a global purchase as an embedded belief-system for policy-makers and the gamut of experts (academics included) that constitute the relevant epistemic communities. It has become a major focus for the UK Research Councils, which have funded a number of knowledge exchange 'hubs', research centres, and programmes to address the linked themes of the creative economy, digitization, cultural value and intellectual property.

This framing of the field, so evidently driven by the political imperative of supporting the national economy in the context of global competition, has engendered two basic responses in the academic world, which I shall simplify as follows. On the one hand, there are the endorsers, who work enthusiastically within the terms of the discourse, treating the creative economy as real. They take their place among the major developers of its lexicon and pursue the further institutionalization of research on the topic – which has become a major topic for textbook treatment and teaching, not least at postgraduate level.

And then there are the dissenters, who are inclined to deconstruct and disaggregate the constitutive parts of the creative economy into a range of cultural practices, critique the discourse as mystifying, and stand back from the policy imperatives, which for them are objects of analysis rather than articles of faith. The price is to be largely ignored outside academic debate and sometimes within it. Of course, in reality the line-up is more complex.<sup>19</sup> Critics pitching for support need to marshal their tropes adeptly to cross the threshold of credibility.

So far as access goes, along with my various colleagues on the projects discussed, I have been very fortunate in securing permission to interview, observe and gather documentation for a wide range of studies. This has not been effortless by any means, but closed doors have been the exception. Along with such obvious factors for engaging in successful fieldwork as the researcher's reputation and capacity for rapport and trustworthiness, in today's no-hiding-place cyberspace our easily accessible profiles are increasingly important in establishing the bona fides sought by those who control access. That said, personal connections, or helpful brokers who know those who need to be known, still seem to be indispensable to opening doors and crossing thresholds, and they will remain crucially important for those conducting future production studies.

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## Note

This chapter picks up from and greatly enlarges on aspects of my presentation at the 'Advancing Media Production Research' conference, University of Leeds, 24 June 2013.



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<sup>1</sup> Karl Mannheim's work on intellectuals was used in analysing the BBC's doctrine of impartiality, and the wide influence of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social constructionism is evident from titles of works on news published at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Epstein (1973), Altheide (1976), Tuchman (1978), and Gans (1979) were all key points of reference from across the pond. Back home, Tunstall (1971), Blumler (1969), Halloran, Elliott and Murdock (1970), and Golding and Elliott (1979) were important contemporary influences.

<sup>3</sup> See Elliott (1972); Tracey (1978); Alvarado and Stewart (1985); Silverstone (1985).

<sup>4</sup> This argument derives from a project on multiplatform media and the digital challenge, with Gillian Doyle PI, Philip Schlesinger CI, and Katherine Champion PDRA.

<sup>5</sup> This is a complex topic and takes me well beyond the confines of this essay. I have touched on it elsewhere in Schlesinger (2013) and Schlesinger, Selfe and Munro (2015b). In approaches taken to the REF, and its long-running predecessor, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), there has always been a tension between true believers and sceptics, even among the administrators of the system. The sceptics have included both vocal opponents and quiet subversives. Whether scope for academic freedom will be further eclipsed or marginalized in any given place depends on people's contracts, institutional tradition, collegiality and the work regime in play. Those who know the history of the stages by which we have arrived at where we are now do need to mentor new generations of researchers both to cope with present demands and simultaneously to help them recognize that the obligation to conform to performance criteria does not mean that the real is the ideal.

<sup>6</sup> The Broadcasting Symposia at the University of Manchester, urbaneely conducted by George Wedell, now largely lost to memory, were an important forum at the time.

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking here of several media academics' contributions to the Third Royal Commission on the Press, which reported in 1977; the setting up of Comedia, both as a publisher and a consultancy, in 1978, whose founder, Charles Landry, later became a guru of the creative economy; and of the policy research in 1983 on cultural industries for the Greater London Council by Nicholas Garnham. The setting up of the Broadcasting Research Unit in the early 1980s, under Michael Tracey, housed at the British Film Institute, was a significant forerunner of later developments in centres and institutes both within and outside academia. Cultural policy analysis – as distinct from cultural studies – developed shortly thereafter (Bennett, 2007) and it has played into creative economy thinking.

<sup>8</sup> Howard Tumber was research fellow, Graham Murdock CI, and Alison Anderson RA.

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's work, flexibly adapted, influenced how the various fields and actors in this study were conceptualized as did a critique of Stuart Hall's approach to 'primary definition'.

<sup>10</sup> Among many others, the work of Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Tom Nairn was influential.

<sup>11</sup> David Miller was CI and William Dinan RA.

<sup>12</sup> Committee work has been the default route. From 1997–2004, I was appointed to the Board of Scottish Screen, the national moving image agency, and was also a Trustee of TRC Media (originally the Research Centre for Television and Interactivity), a charitable body involved in developing independent TV producers' businesses, from 1998–2008. In 2004, I was appointed to the UK communications regulator Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Scotland (ACS), which I then chaired from 2009–2014, with an ex officio seat on Ofcom's Nations Committee. I still sit on the ACS, as member for Scotland of Ofcom's Content Board, which has a UK-wide regulatory remit. Of course, what is learned in such contexts deeply affects your understanding of the inner life of institutions and has a major influence on your thinking.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Paterson co-directed these seminars with me.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Frith and Richard Paterson were CIs, with Pille Petersoo, then Maggie Magor as PDRAs, and Lynne Hibberd as linked PhD.

<sup>15</sup> Inter alia, my earlier work had discussed intellectuals and political violence as well as the Cold War (Schlesinger, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Boyle, Maggie Magor, and Lynne Hibberd also worked on this project. The briefing given to the board fell on deaf ears, but that's another story.

<sup>17</sup> Gillian Doyle was PI, Raymond Boyle and Philip Schlesinger CIs, and Lisa Kelly PDRA.

<sup>18</sup> There is a wider issue here: the framing and provenance of research funding by no means determines all the outcomes. How to manage the gap between framing and finding is a key skill needed in the new research order, but it is certainly not a new one. Melanie Selfe was CI and Ealasaid Munro PDRA.

<sup>19</sup> I am aware of the irony of my own position, as a sceptical deputy director of the RCUK Centre for Copyright and New Business Models in the Creative Economy.

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